

EXHIBIT M

DECLARATION OF ALICIA LEHRER

I, Alicia Lehrer, declare as follows:

1. I am the Executive Director of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (WRWC), a nonprofit based in Providence, Rhode Island. WRWC is a member of the Alliance for Nonprofit Impact in Rhode Island, a member of the National Council of Nonprofits.

2. The statements in this declaration are based on my personal knowledge and my review of WRWC business records.

3. WRWC incorporated as a nonprofit in Providence in 2001. Its mission is to create positive environmental, social and economic change by revitalizing the Woonasquatucket River, its Greenway, and its communities. The Greenway is a seven-mile-long multiuse trail and linear park that follows the river from downtown Providence to neighboring Johnston. It has been recognized as a model community revitalization effort.

4. We pursue our work on a number of different fronts. One is environmental restoration, where we work to improve natural habitats, restore fish passage on the river, and protect stream banks that have been damaged due to flooding, particularly in the urban sections of the lower watershed where the impacts are the greatest and affect the largest populations. There are parts of the trail and riverbank that have really become compromised by strong storms in recent years. Taking care of riparian buffers and wetlands is important for protecting against future damage from flooding.

5. In addition, we care for and extend, expand, and activate the Greenway, including by removing invasive plants so we can bring back native species that provide a great home for birds, mammals, amphibians, and other local animals. We do community education programs for children and adults and skills and job training initiatives. And for many years, we have worked with all levels of government to address severe dioxin contamination at the Centerdale Manor Superfund Site in North Providence and Johnston, RI.

6. WRWC receives about 70–80% of our funding from federal grants. We work with a pretty diverse group of agencies: several USDA subagencies, the Department of Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and the US Environmental Protection Agency. We employ around 32 staff members, some of whom are part time.

7. Since the end of January, we have had a grant of \$1 million frozen that we cannot access while it is under review. We are actually a subgrantee and were contracted to receive these funds through another nonprofit group that has a grant directly from the U.S. Forest Service. They notified us that the money was inaccessible because it was funded under the Inflation Reduction Act.

8. That pause to our grant has completely halted the project we planned to carry out and disrupted our operations more broadly. The grant was meant to fund a project to build capacity for urban forestry along the Woonasquatucket Greenway. It was a pilot program to create what is known as a Miyawaki forest, a method of

forestry that is meant to create the conditions to mimic multilayered, old growth forests in a short amount of time.

9. Besides providing a habitat for a broader variety of animal species and creating a relaxing place for people to enjoy and keep cooler during the summer, the advantage of old-growth forests is that they are much more resilient than younger forests. They can better withstand different types of stressors—fungus, bacteria, and other things that can damage and kill trees. That kind of resilience is particularly important at a time of rapid changes to the climate, which can introduce new stressors on local forests.

10. We planned to engage resident community leaders and students to build these forests. On top of the conservation benefits of this project, it also feeds our education and community action programs. We train students and adults in restoring and improving the environment and give them leadership skills and job-related skills such as forest management and tree stewardship. This and other projects create job opportunities for people that live near the Greenway. But none of that is happening now as a result of this pause, which means the loss of a workforce-development opportunity.

11. We planned to use this grant to hire people to help with this project and with other parts of our mission that we cannot now hire. Our River Ranger team, led by year-round professionals, and including six to eight seasonal Rangers, care for the river and the Greenway. Through this funding, we planned to hire two new full-time Ranger staff that will become our tree experts and will lead more than 10 trainees

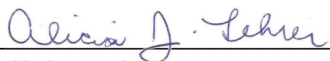
and community members that will receive stipends as tree stewards. Now, because this grant is frozen, we are unable to hire those two full-time positions and employ the many other members of the team that will be responsible for all the other planting and tree projects we have throughout the Greenway. We were counting on those team members who are critical when we are caring for 7 miles and 75 acres of public green spaces and multi-use trail. So this freeze creates problems not only for the pilot forestry program but for WRWC's other work as well. We are now unable to hire for positions we planned to fill.

12. Another challenge is that so much of our work is seasonal. The season runs basically April through November. Now is when we need to be doing our hiring so we can have a team in place and trained up by the time we need people out in the field. If the money stays tied up long enough, we won't be able to carry out the grant project until next year at the earliest.

13. It is hard to plan for the future when we cannot trust that grants we've been awarded are going to be available when we need them. I already had to put together the organizational budget for 2025. The positions we intended to fill were integrated into quite a few of our program areas. Without those positions, we're going to be stretched thin and simply unable to get done all that we hoped to be able to achieve for the river and the local community.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on March 11, 2025.


Alicia Lehrer